

## Contacts:

- Jennifer Goldfinger, 415-892-0435, [jenlfinger@comcast.net](mailto:jenlfinger@comcast.net)
  - Dale Kline, Novato City Birthday Party / Paint the Town Red Chair, 415-717-4265, [klinefamily1@comcast.net](mailto:klinefamily1@comcast.net)
- 

## Jennifer Goldfinger Named 2025 Novato Citizen of the Year



Things Jennifer Goldfinger is really good at making: Deviled eggs, and things happen ... as in making things happen in Novato, her place of residence for over 50 years.

Hands down one of the most dedicated civic contributors in the city's history, Jennifer was chosen as the 2025 recipient of the Novato Citizen of the Year award by a committee of former Citizens of the Year. She was honored before more than 200 attendees of the annual Novato City Birthday Party, held Saturday, January 24, at the Bill and Adele Jonas Center on the Indian Valley campus of the College of Marin. Special guests on hand included her two daughters, Julie Perry and Michelle Bettinger, her sons-in-law & three granddaughters.

The Marin County Board of Supervisors recently passed a proclamation in Jennifer's honor with a list of "whereases." Among the cited evidence of Jennifer's worthiness of the title was that "she has demonstrated exceptional dedication for the Novato community for nearly five decades, contributing her time, leadership, and expertise across numerous civic, cultural, educational, and nonprofit organizations."

Through the decades, Jennifer has volunteered for the Novato Fourth of July Parade, the Novato City Birthday Party, the Novato Chamber, the Novato Historical Guild, North Marin Community Services, the Rotary Club of Ignacio, the nonprofit "The Book Place" shop in downtown Novato.

Cheryl Paddack, the Chief Executive Officer of North Marin Community Services, nominated Jennifer for Citizen of the Year. She felt compelled not only because of Jennifer's incredible legacy of community service but also as a consolation prize after their "deviled egg duel." Not long ago, Jennifer's European-style eggs and Cheryl's Canadian eggs were brought before the NMCS Board of Directors for a blind taste test. (Cheryl won).

Cheryl's nomination of Jennifer was heartfelt. "She consistently exemplifies her expertise in teamwork, leadership, budgeting, governance, and a deep understanding of government and politics," Paddock wrote. "She embodies ethical integrity and fairness, qualities that have made her an invaluable contributor to every endeavor she undertakes."

So many times, Jennifer's London accent has triggered quizzical looks or harmless jibes. The irony of her serving as president of the Novato Fourth of July Parade never goes unnoticed. Every year on parade morning, as she's hustling to coordinate things from the Dr. Insomniac's Coffee & Teas back patio, a smart aleck friend is liable to point to her and say "The British are coming! The British are coming!" But anyone who thinks they are the first to fire off a one-liner about a redcoat running the USA's Independence Day parade is sadly mistaken.

"She's lived here decades longer than in England," daughter Julie said.

This year, she's busy planning Novato's red-white-and-blue celebration for the United States' 250th anniversary with co-chairs Shawna McNulty and Sophia Osotio. Very few locals know that planning the parade is a year-round part-time job, especially for the volunteer leadership team. The committee brainstorms ideas for creative entries, logistics, vendors, safety measures, and ways to recruit more volunteers.

Kathy Nickel, the 2015 Citizen of the Year, had been an inspirational leader as the parade's chair for many years. Sadly, Nickel fell ill in 2023 and passed away three days after the 2024 Fourth of July Parade. Vicki McDill, a former Citizen of the Year and the parade's treasurer for decades, said she noticed reluctance on Jennifer's part in taking the helm.

"Although she wouldn't let us call her the chair of the parade, Jennifer relented and has been doing it since then," McDill said. "She's doing a good job of it."

Jennifer's civic volunteering in Novato started soon after she & her husband moved to Novato in 1972. Her first foray was with the Novato Human Needs Center (now North Marin Community Services) where she helped with the KINSHIP hotline and the Holiday Share event. Years later, after joining the staff at the City of Novato, Jennifer volunteered for Novato Human Needs Friends committee and co-chaired its annual "An Affair to Remember" fund-raising event.

Seth Shorett, now of Bank of Marin, worked closely with Jennifer at many North Marin Community Services and Chamber events and called her "the gold standard for civic engagement."

"Jennifer has not only volunteered, she has led," he said. "Her leadership is consistent, genuine, and inspiring. Whether organizing food drives for the NMCS Food Pantry,

coordinating fundraising events, or working behind the scenes at community events, she approaches every role with dedication and purpose.”

When she applied for North Marin Community Services’ board of directors in 2024, Jennifer explained why she was drawn to the important nonprofit.

“I knew this was an organization that focused on assisting people who needed extra support,” she wrote. “I’ve been interested in helping people who are not as fortunate as others. Immigrants especially need assistance more than others. Some people need more of a lift up, such as with housing, but all people should be given the opportunity and means to access critical services.”

Her own experience as an immigrant shaped that compassion, but it really goes back her entire family being in England as refugees from Nazi Germany. As with many descendants of World War II refugees, she knew she was lucky that her parents escaped the Nazis and were allowed to settle in England. Her parents were extremely appreciative of their new adopted country.

“I can’t imagine the trauma they experienced in losing dozens of close family members (in the Holocaust) and how difficult it was for them to start a new life in a new country, new language and a new child,” daughter Julie said. “The Jewish culture was a big part of their life, and they wanted to retain their heritage. Her parents were working poor, but they managed to create a safe and happy environment for their only child. I know that’s where my mom got her sense of helping the less fortunate.”

Young Jennifer grew up in a small apartment in northwest London, on the working-class end of Abbey Road, famous stateside for that Beatles’ album cover photo. Her father was a tailor, and her mother worked in catering. As a teen, she volunteered to visit with pensioners, or what we in the States would call older adults or retirees. After high school, Jennifer went north to study at the University of Manchester with a focus on social and human services,

She met Dan Goldfinger, a San Francisco resident, who was visiting his relatives in England after graduating from San Francisco State. Dan was born in South America after his parents fled Berlin and found safe haven there. After years of trying, the Goldfinger family made it to America in the post war years, first to Boston and then the Sunset District of San Francisco.

“My dad proposed to her 10 days after they’d met,” Julie said.

Daughter Michelle added, “Their relationship stood the test of time even though he offended the entire British nation by using his hands to eat a hamburger on their first date. As anyone with manners knows, a hamburger should be eaten with a knife and fork.”

Their official marriage took place at San Francisco City Hall in March 1969, but they had a traditional ceremony that July in England after Jennifer graduated from the University of Manchester. Other than moving away from her family, leaving England for America wasn't that big of a deal for Jennifer. "Mom has said that she never felt British; she was just born there but extremely grateful to the British for her excellent free education and health care," daughter Julie said.

The couple raised their two daughters in Novato, first off South Novato Boulevard and later, in 1980, on the west side of town. As the girls grew up, Jennifer got involved with PTAs and school events plus helping with her daughters' extracurricular activities.

Meanwhile, Jennifer had a successful career in local government, following her passion to contribute to the well-being of everyone. For two decades she worked for the City & County of San Francisco Department of Social Services before being hired by the City of Novato in 1990. She worked in the Community Development Department, Parks, Recreation and Community Services Department and then moved into the City Manager's Office, serving as Assistant to the City Manager. She retired in 2011.

Dan had an award-winning career in the toy and gift industry and was inducted into the Western Toy & Hobby Representatives Association Hall of Fame. After Dan died suddenly in 2013, Jennifer somehow kept calm and carried on, as the famous British morale-boosting slogan went. They had been married almost 45 years.

"It was so sad that my parents only had two years of retirement together," daughter Julie said. "They wanted to travel even more than they did. Once she got past the shock of losing my dad, my mom leaned back into volunteering. I was in awe that she didn't sit there and say woe is me.

"Helping with so many causes in Novato has been super great for her. Obviously, the community has benefitted from that."

Daughter Michelle added that it's been inspiring to see her mother work hard and channel her passion for helping others less fortunate than her.

"Her family is extremely proud of her, especially after seeing her lean into her volunteer work and finding purpose and meaning after the tragic and unexpected loss of my dad," Michelle said. "This honor is well-deserved."

###